

News For Thought



Naturalistic Motorcycle Safety Study

The Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) has announced that it will partner with the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI) on the world's first motorcycle safety study that will use small video recorders and instrumentation mounted on numerous bikes for 6-18 months to gather data about the riders and events that occur.

Termed a "naturalistic" study, VTTI has developed this technology and used it successfully to conduct a 100-car study in 2005 that included 69 crashes and more than 750 near-crashes. According to the MSF, "The method is presently in use by researchers across the globe to target nearly every type of roadway user, with the exception of two-wheeled vehicles. This study, expected to be on the road by early 2011, will greatly advance the understanding of interactions among rider, motorcycle, roadway, other roadway users and the environment."

VTTI Director Tom Dingus added that "We expect the study to be very valuable to the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's work, since we also will examine where and how crash avoidance is successful. With so much information bandwidth coming from the cameras and instrumentation on each bike, we'll be able to examine details for years, and the findings will be relevant for decades."

Naturalistic Method identifies crashes using time-series video and numeric data, reveals factors not detectable through crash investigation, creates its own controls by comparing the crash-involved rider to himself/herself at all other times, and permits quantification of rider performance and behavior in non-critical and critical riding situations.

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Patriot Guard Riders Barred From Miners Memorial

Many of the 29 West Virginia coal miners who died at the Upper Big Branch mining explosion on April 5th were veterans and some rode motorcycles, so bereaved families had requested the Patriot Guard Riders to attend the memorial service. PGR is an informal group of motorcyclists which exists to make sure that all veterans are given respectful funerals. But they were barred from attending this service by federal officials who labeled them a security threat.

The appearance of the Patriot Guard Riders at the service, at the request of several families, had been cleared in advance by West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin, who is also a motorcycle rider. But the day before the service, Joe Cumblidge, the West Virginia State Captain of the Patriot Guard Riders e-mailed the men who were scheduled to participate: "Due to circumstances totally and completely beyond the control of the Patriot Guard Riders and Governor Joe Manchin of West Virginia, we are regrettably ordering a STAND DOWN for this mission. Specific details will not be posted here but, we've been told we are not welcome to participate because of certain high-level dignitaries that are scheduled to be in attendance."

The "high-level dignitaries" were President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden. A Patriot Guard Rider told WSAZ in Charleston that Manchin had been forbidden to allow them to participate "because of overwhelming security concerns with high-ranking federal officials -- it was just not logistically possible for them to be a part of the event."

Both Obama and Biden managed to escape West Virginia unharmed.
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Angry French Motorcyclists Snarl Traffic In Protest

Forty thousand motorcyclists demonstrated all over France in protest of a recent Government announcement to fine any bikers caught filtering through traffic ("lane splitting"), and more than 60 cities saw their roads blocked by hordes of angry riders who said NON to French authorities who propose to treat motorbikes, scooters and mopeds like cars and require them to stay in their lane one behind another. So, they behaved like cars! On March 13th the

La Fédération Française Des Motards en Colère (FFMC - the French Federation of Angry Bikers) urged all motorcyclists to occupy the space of one car in each lane, and within minutes an enormous traffic jam was created that gridlocked the whole of Paris on a busy Saturday afternoon as car drivers were stuck in traffic until late in the evening.

While bikers blocked the roadways above ground, other protestors went underground bringing the subway system to a grinding halt in response to a statement made by French Transport Secretary Jean-Marc Belotti, who said "If they (bikers) are not happy, they can take the metro like everyone else."

They inconvenience us, we will inconvenience them, responded the FFMC, which set a fine example of civil obedience to demonstrate the impact of motorcycles on traffic flow, good or bad. www.ON-A-BIKE.com

Legal Challenges to Michigan Helmet Law

Several members of ABATE of Michigan rode to the Lenawee County judicial building on Tuesday, April 20th to show support for a fellow motorcyclist who is challenging a non-compliant helmet ticket. Ryan Hildebrand, 26, is one of nearly a dozen riders ticketed this spring by Adrian police Sgt. Lynn Courington for wearing helmets that the state claims do not meet federal Department of Transportation standards.

Representing the group of ticketed riders is Aid to Injured Motorcyclists (A.I.M.) attorney Lawrence "Katman" Katkowsky, who filed an appearance for the helmet defendant. A formal hearing was set for June 29 in district court, and Katkowsky said he will try to consolidate all the helmet infraction cases that are being challenged for the June 29 hearing. "The issues are all the same," he said.

He is taking on the helmet enforcement issue in Lenawee County on behalf of ABATE of Michigan, which also has a lawsuit pending in United State District Court in Grand Rapids, challenging the state's DOT helmet rule.

One of the enforcement issues Katkowsky will raise is regarding probable cause to justify a traffic stop on a civil infraction. ABATE claims in the lawsuit that police have to look inside a helmet to determine if it meets DOT standards, and therefore cannot claim plain sight evidence to justify a traffic stop and request to inspect a helmet. No trial date is scheduled.

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Weird News: Easy Writers Text While Riding

Everyone knows that texting while driving can be dangerous. Now consider this: texting while riding a motorcycle, in heavy traffic! It's not uncommon in Vietnam, where 29 million motorcycles are the

primary source of transportation. Pham Thi Thuy Linh is 21, a college student and -- according to a recent contest sponsored by a mobile phone company -- has the fastest fingers in Vietnam. She can text 160 characters in 25 seconds, though she admits she is "about 20 or 30 percent slower texting on my bike." She doesn't much care that texting while driving is both illegal and not too smart.

Tran Van Thanh is a senior official in the government's office of traffic safety. He told National Public Radio that understands the concerns about texting while driving, but says peoples' bad habits will take time to change, and with limited resources it's impossible to crack down on everyone for everything.

Meanwhile, contest-winner Pham says she can't wait to get one of the new iPhone packages. She says it will enable her to text even faster than she does now, from everywhere -- including her bike. www.ON-A-BIKE.com

Quotable Quote: "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. Moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue."

Senator Barry Goldwater (1909-1998) U.S. Senator from Arizona

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